

City of San Antonio/Bexar County
Citizens Commission on City/County
Service Integration



Background and Summary of
Preliminary Recommendations

April 22, 2004

Citizens Commission on City/County Service Integration

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BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

The Citizens Commission on City/County Service Integration was appointed in October 2003 by the San Antonio City Council and Bexar County Commissioners Court. It consists of 23 members, including 11 appointed by City Council, 11 appointed by Commissioners Court, and the Chair appointed jointly by Mayor Ed Garza and County Judge Nelson Wolff.

The Commission was created against the background of the failure of efforts in the 1990s to achieve formal structural consolidation of city and county governments and the limited but increasing success of efforts since 2001 to integrate city and county services through interlocal contracts and agreements. Its objective is to achieve more substantial benefits in the efficiency, effectiveness, equity and accountability of both governments while continuing to maintain their separate identity as two distinct governments with overlapping jurisdictions. It is also to make local government more seamless and transparent to the citizens who are the taxpayers of both governments.

The Commission was charged to:

- (1) Review best practices and models of service integration from other communities, including the role of special districts and authorities alongside city and county governments;
- (2) Develop and implement community education programs on the desirability of functional consolidation of city and county services;
- (3) Recommend a plan to transfer and consolidate functions and services between the city and county governments and other special districts that is equitable to both city and county taxpayers; and
- (4) Develop a draft of any state legislation that may be needed to implement the Commission's recommendations.

The Commission has conducted extensive research into the existing structure and functioning of our city and county governments, including many hours of detailed briefings and discussions with a large number of staff from the City, the County and other local governments. It has studied the historical development of city and county governments in Texas and considered academic research on "best practices" in the assignment of functions among local governments in a metropolitan area.

In order to examine the full universe of city and county services, the Commission divided into six subcommittees to study the following functional areas:

- Public Safety B including law enforcement, fire, EMS, emergency operations and related services;
- Administrative Support Services B including personnel, purchasing, information services, records management and related services;
- Health and Human Resources B including the Metropolitan Health District, University Health System, City Community Initiatives and related services;

- Utilities, Public Works and Environmental Services B including stormwater, drainage and flood control, solid waste collection and disposal, air quality, water supply, sewage treatment, streets and highways, and related services;
- Planning and Urban Development B including planning, housing, CDBG administration, economic development and related services; and
- Recreation and Leisure Services B including parks and recreation, libraries, tourism, arts and cultural programs, entertainment and related services.

The Commission also created a Community Education Subcommittee to organize “town hall” meetings on possible Commission recommendations, develop community education programs through the mass media, and conduct related information and outreach programs. A number of Commission members served on more than one of these subcommittees.

The governing bodies that appointed the Commission asked it to submit preliminary recommendations in time for them to be considered in developing the City’s and County’s budgets for FY 2005. This means by the beginning of May 2004. The Commission has been severely tested by the ambitiousness of this schedule.

This document is the Commission’s preliminary report, containing its recommendations as far as it has been possible to develop them under this deadline. For clarity and ease of understanding, these recommendations are divided into four main sections: (1) those that the Commission believes will require new state legislation before they can be implemented (or fully implemented), (2) those that will require a formal interlocal agreement adopted by City Council and Commissioners Court, (3) those that can be implemented by administrative action alone, and (4) several concluding recommendations on the future of the city-county service integration effort.

This document does not contain the outline of the legislation that may be required to implement these recommendations. The Commission simply has not had time to consider these issues, or to obtain the advice of the City Attorney and the District Attorney’s Civil Section on this matter. The Commission expects to address this part of its mandate following the presentation of this report in May, and on a schedule that will allow these items to be considered as Council and Commissioners Court develop their respective 2005 state legislative programs.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS REQUIRING LEGISLATION

City-County Health Authority

The City and County should place the Metropolitan Health District, the University Health System, the Medical Examiner, and the Forensics Lab under the governance of a single city-county health authority, governed by an independent board akin to the current University Health System board. This authority should also play a stronger role in establishing standards for Emergency Medical Service in suburban cities and the unincorporated area.

City and County Social Services

The City's Department of Community Initiatives and the County's Department of Housing and Human Services should be administratively integrated to the maximum possible degree. Pending formal structural reorganization, their services should be co-located (along with appropriate state agencies) at locations where citizens should be able to apply for all available forms of assistance, and one application form should cover all kinds of assistance needed.

San Antonio/Bexar County History Center

The City and the County should complete the necessary feasibility studies and enter into a partnership to develop and manage a San Antonio/Bexar County History Center.

RECOMMENDATIONS REQUIRING AN INTERLOCAL AGREEMENT

City and County Housing Authorities

The San Antonio Housing Authority and the Housing Authority of Bexar County should be consolidated into a single city-county housing authority. Pending this structural reorganization, HABC should contract with SAHA for administration of all its programs.

County CDBG Administration

Bexar County should contract for administration and monitoring of its CDBG program (except for direct County government capital improvements) by the City. This recommendation entails no change in the decision-making authority to allocate funds by the Commissioners Court.

Subdivision Development Process

The City and County should amend their interlocal agreement under HB 1445 to make the County a "reviewing agency" for subdivision plats, thereby falling under the City's Unified Development Code time limits for review. The Commissioners Court should "approve" plats during that review period. A joint plat application and fee process should be established with consistent fees. Additionally, the County should adopt the subdivision regulations of the UDC to ensure consistent code enforcement throughout the ETJ and the unincorporated area.

Countywide 3-1-1 System

The City's 3-1-1 program should be expanded to include all County services.

Satellite Service Offices

The City's Community Link Service Centers and the County's scattered satellite offices should be combined into a network of service centers where citizens can conduct all kinds of routine business with the City and County governments at a single location. These consolidated service centers should also include CPS, SAWS, and Bexar Metropolitan Water District.

Regional Police Training Academy

The Sheriff's training academy and the AACOG training academy should be integrated into the City's training academy as a regional training facility. This regional academy should also have a formal relationship with the degree-granting program of the Alamo Community College District.

Central Jury Pool

The City and County should enter into an interlocal agreement to provide for jurors in Municipal Court to be selected from the citizens responding to the County's call to jury service.

Park Security

Bexar County and the San Antonio River Authority should enter into an interlocal agreement to provide security at all the parks in Bexar County through the San Antonio Parks Police.

S.A.R.A. Park Reservations

The San Antonio River Authority's parks should be included in the consolidated central reservations system.

City and County Human Resources

The City's and County's Departments of Human Resources should be administratively consolidated in some form.

Geographic Information Systems

Bexar County should enter into an interlocal agreement with the City of San Antonio to allow for information development and exchange in the Geographic Information System (GIS) that the City operates.

Countywide Household Hazardous Waste Collection

The City should develop agreements which would enable suburban residents to utilize the City's household hazardous waste drop-off center with minimal or no on-site charge to them.

County Illegal Dumping

To avoid duplication of specialized equipment, Bexar County should contract with the City of San Antonio for the use of City crews and equipment to clean-up illegal dump sites in the unincorporated area. In the meantime, it should also seek greater legal authority and flexibility in combating illegal dumping as part of its 2005 legislative agenda.

County Traffic Signals Operation and Maintenance

Bexar County should explore the potential for economies in the maintenance of traffic lights and flashers and installation/maintenance of traffic control signs and pavement markings in the unincorporated area by contracting with the City for these services.

RECOMMENDATIONS REQUIRING ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION**Coordinated Parks Policies**

The City, the County and the San Antonio River Authority should adopt a consistent set of rules and practices to govern parks throughout Bexar County.

Flood Control

A third iteration of the Countywide Citizens' Watershed Committee, with as many of the original members as possible, should be established in FY 2008 to review the effectiveness of the existing interlocal agreement on flood control after its first few years of functioning. Their

report should recommend needed revisions to the agreement or the establishment of a separate entity.

County Streets and Roads Maintenance

Bexar County should “ride” the City’s bids for paving and street/road repair materials as much as possible.

Library Book Purchases

Suburban municipal libraries should purchase books and materials through the San Antonio Public Library’s contracts with vendors.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE CITY-COUNTY SERVICE INTEGRATION

Continuing City-County Service Integration

The City and County should establish a follow-up City-County Service Integration Commission for a term of several years to monitor and oversee current integration projects and to facilitate future integration projects.

City-County Technology Purchasing

The City and County should create a joint staff working group to ensure that future technology purchases are compatible between the two governments, and that they are implemented under a conscious design to facilitate future integration of services.

Integration of Quality of Life Services

The City and County should thoroughly evaluate the feasibility of consolidating “quality of life” services such as libraries, parks and recreation, golf courses, and operation/management of cultural and sports venues on a countywide basis. A successor to this Commission should make substantive recommendations on these issues.

Marketing of City Services

The City should develop a regular program to analyze the costs of extending particular services to suburban municipalities and actively offer these services to them on an equitable basis.